A BALANCING ACT: MEDIATING BRAND AND LOCAL AUTHENTICITY IN LOCALISED RETAIL DESIGN

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ABSTRACT

Retail design authenticity has seen global brands expressing a growing interest in unique as opposed to standardised expressions of store design. To express authenticity, global brands may opt for localised retail store design (retail stores that express the place in which the store is designed) as a form of unique retail design that offers an experience that is rooted in a time and place. Localised retail design differs from conventional modes of retail design in that designers source inspiration from both brand and place (as opposed to brand only). This poses risks to brand recognition as the resultant retail store is not standardised nor aligned exclusively to the reflection of brand identity. This necessitates consideration in the mediation of global brand and local authenticity when localising retail design. This study asks: *What are the areas for mediating global brand and local authenticity when localising retail design?* Using a constructivist grounded theory approach we conducted eighteen interviews with retail designers based worldwide. The interviews are augmented with a theoretical sampling of twenty artefacts of localised retail design for four global brands. It was found that global brand and local authenticity can be mediated in three main areas when localising retail design. These are in the authorship, informants, and inhabitation of retail design. In the authorship of the retail store, authenticity can be attained by appointing both brand and local designers who work collaboratively on localised retail design. In sourcing informants to the retail design, designers should derive inspiration from both brand and local essence to enhance authentic representation. In inhabitation, the retail store should communicate the brand to local consumers while platforming experiences on local consumer culture. The contribution of the study is a novel conceptual model founded on these three areas for mediating brand and local authenticity in localised retail. This model has implications for both retail designers and brand managers in the development of localised retail experiences of global brands.

KEYWORDS

Authenticity, brand consistency, brand identity, global brands, localised retail design

INTRODUCTION

Taking a retail design perspective, the concept of authenticity in localised retail design for global brands is explored. Although localised retail design (the design of retail stores that are customised according to the location of the store) requires consideration towards an authentic representation of local place (the culture, features, and idiosyncratic aspects of the context), it equally requires an authentic representation of the global brand so that it is recognisable to consumers. Mediating between an authentic global brand and local representation can cause tension in the process of designing localised retail stores. This article aims to further an understanding of balancing between global brand and local authenticity and identifies areas where global brand and local authenticity are to be mediated when localising retail design.

We argue that authenticity is an under-explored concept in the retail design discourse. While definitions and conceptual frameworks exist pertaining to brand authenticity (Gilmore and Pine 2007; Beverland 2009; Urde 2013; Teufel and Zimmermann 2015), these do not extend to brand identity management in retail design. Yet, brand authenticity is a priority for consumers (Gilmore and Pine 2007), who will base their decisions to support brands on their perceptions of how authentic a brand is. Consumers prefer the unique and traceable nature of authentic products and spaces (Teufel and Zimmermann 2015). In the case of brands, the communication of brand identity is a demonstration of authenticity. The story, spirit, and values embodied in a brand's identity are expressed in its products, communication channels, and retail stores (Teufel and Zimmermann 2015).

While this demonstration of authenticity to the brand may be associated with factors beyond a brand's identity (such as its alignment with social and environmental causes) (Teufel and Zimmermann 2015), it is argued that consumers receive brand authenticity positively if a brand is true to itself whilst exhibiting further attributes that enhance its authenticity (Pine and Gilmore 2008). This implies that authentic retail design is reliant on a brand's authentic expression of self.

Consumers can recognise authenticity in brands by seeing an expression of a unique version of that brand while linking the brand to its origins (Pine and Gilmore 2008). This is through expressing 'brand essence' (the roots of a brand) (Newman and Dhar 2014). Consequently, retail store designs for brands are a carefully controlled spatial expression of a brand's essence. Conventionally, this is portrayed in standardised retail design that is rolled out across multiple sites (Teufel and Zimmermann 2015). This standardised mode of retail design facilitates consistent brand identity and associations of quality. However, the reproduced nature of rolled-out retail design devalues its authenticity as it reduces originality, a quality associated with authenticity (Teufel and Zimmermann 2015). The standardised retail store is a spatial form of mass production.

Mass production is oriented towards the making of commercial goods. It can be contrasted with small-scale production that is oriented towards the making of artistic goods (Hesmondhalgh 2006). As the retail interior provides

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the physical places of consumption, facilitates mass-produced culture (Königk 2015), and is a form of small-scale production, it may act as mediator between small-scale and mass production. These two spheres of production may be distinguished by the degree of authenticity they display. Since mass production demonstrated a ubiquitous and reproducible nature of goods which lowers their perceived value, the individuality of 'authentic' objects promises a higher value for being original and unique (Peterson 2005). In opposition to standardised retail design, brands can enhance their authenticity through unique and un-scalable retail stores that are specific to the time and place (Teufel and Zimmermann 2015). The link between originality and authenticity can be emphasised through non-repeating retail design that contradicts the roll-out model that is prolific in the retail design industry (Teufel and Zimmermann 2015). Mass-produced retail stores reduce authenticity, and hence, the value of the brand as it is commonplace (Teufel and Zimmermann 2015).

If 'place' is considered as the location of experience in which the individual's immersion in the world is constructed by the physical parameters of that experience (Berleant 2003), then it becomes imperative to consider the benefits that place-specific design informants may bring to authentic retail design for global brands. The *genius loci* (*lit.* 'spirit of place') is defined by Norberg-Schultz (1980) as the meaningful connotations associated with man-made places. Identifying the *genius loci* provides a meaningful argument for sensitive approaches to places (Thompson 2003). While the consideration of *genius loci* leads to multiple interpretations (Brook in Thompson, 2003) which fall outside the scope of this paper, the benefits of place-context will be included as a means for brands to develop and express authenticity. Brands may express authenticity through unique retail stores designed especially for the place in which the store is based, implying a traceability to place (Teufel and Zimmermann 2015). By localising their retail design, brands may communicate authenticity to the context with spaces that are tailored for the 'here and now' (Teufel and Zimmermann 2015).

Conversely, the creative scope afforded to designers to localise retail design opens the brand to diluting its identity through the production of dissimilar retail stores. This can compromise brand recognition (and quality of experience) in favour of pursuing a local identity. It may also come across as contradictory and compromising the brand's truth to self, which serves as the conditional starting point to communicating authenticity (Pine and Gilmore 2008). The attention to authenticity extends to local representation in retail design. Contextual authenticity is a further concern. As brands derive inspiration from local contexts and translate this to retail design, the authenticity of representation of location is questionable (Khan 2021). While local authenticity has received attention in the tourism discourse (with specific reference to the dangers of place consumption), limited attention has been afforded to local authenticity in retail design. This form of authenticity is a crucial concern for localised retail design for global brands, as consumers tend to deem experiences as inauthentic when mass production is involved (Plevoets and Van Cleempoel 2011).

From the perspective of the retail designer, we consider the expression of global brand and local authenticity as a condition for localising retail design. We view this expression of authenticity as a balancing act, requiring the mediation of two factors: brand and place. We assert that localised retail design should demonstrate both global brand and local authenticity, and that retail designers (and global brands) require the ability to counter-balance the expression of authenticity concurrently. This presents a difficulty: the global brand and the local context may require unique considerations to be reflected with authenticity. Further, global brand and local context may have competing interests in being represented authentically. This may present complications in the design process as retail designers may struggle to diffuse the tensions between representing the global brand's identity and local identity through localising retail design. These opposing interests require a synchronised consideration that can assist retail designers and global brand managers to achieve a comfortable balance between representing global brand and local authenticity in localised retail design.

Mediating between brand and local authenticity therefore becomes an important consideration in localising retail design for global brands. This concept of mediation is recognised in the retail design discourse as an identified tension between brand and local authenticity (Plevoets and Van Cleempoel 2011). Although it is recognised that brand and local place provide competing interests in the expression of 'authenticity', several global brands have demonstrated this is possible through the practice of retail design that exhibits brand coherence while remaining true to the location (for example, Aesop [Down and Paphitis 2019]). However, the areas for mediating global brand and local authenticity remain unknown. Within this article, we focus on the following question: *What are the areas for mediating global brand and local authenticity when localising retail design?* The paper aims to identify the areas that require mediation in communicating brand and place authentically in localised retail design. This is to inform global brand management and retail design practices in localising retail design.

Initially, the paper establishes the concept of authenticity. Thereafter, we deliberate authenticity in retail design, before considering its application to localised retail design. Specific gaps are highlighted in the discourse pertaining to mediating between brand and local authenticity in localised retail design.

The methodological considerations are explained as applied to the use of the constructivist grounded theory method in the process of data collection (qualitative interviews) and analysis (coding, memo-writing, and constant comparison).

Finally, the areas for mediating global brand and local authenticity in localised retail design are discussed and illustrated with a conceptual model. These are in the authorship, informants, and inhabitation of localised retail design. This is followed with a conceptual model illustrating the findings. We conclude with the findings, contributions, and recommendations for further research.

AUTHENTICITY IN RETAIL DESIGN

Agarwal et al (2020, p. 1888) points out the mediation that is necessary to successfully communicate brand meaning through retail design: there must be direct connotation between the product and the consumer, and the retailer will have short-term objectives which must be met with a consistent brand image. This is to be maintained across multiple brand channels. Brand consistency is optimally managed through a standardised or prototypical retail design, rolled out across multiple locations (Bengtsson et al. 2010). Brands opt for standardised modes of retail design, not only due to the economies of scale involved in reproducibility (Teufel and Zimmermann 2015), but also in order to maintain a level of brand consistency across all retail expressions. Fitch (1991, cited in Vasquez & Bruce 2002) argues that the brand ethos and identity must by consistently and clearly communicated to maintain cohesive brand associations; these must be embedded in a persuasive retail environment.

Consistency and coherence contribute to the standardisation of the brand experience, which enhances brand recognition. Brand consistency heightens the ability for consumers to recognise brands and demonstrates a consistent quality of the retail design (Bengtsson et al. 2010). Although the consistent expression of a brand's identity lends a sense of truth to the brand, the replication of its retail design depletes its authenticity (Teufel and Zimmermann 2015), as the retail interior is perceived as a mass-produced product itself. Pine and Gilmore (2007) describe this perception of authenticity.

> *Any retail-oriented company with numerous outlets should note: the process by which a retailer grows its business – namely adding more outlets – is the very same process that destroys the brand, as sameness – the commoditizing antithesis of originality – creeps in. Ensuring that different outlets have unique characteristics goes a long way toward maintaining a strong sense of authenticity. No matter your business, you should study your firsts to determine which beginnings deserve calling to attention, and figure out how you can commemorate each in original ways. (Pine and Gilmore 2007: 58-59)*

Although brands pursue the desire to remain authentic through conventional standardised modes of retail design, it is argued that they may enhance authenticity by reimagining their identity in unrepeatable and unique retail design expressions that increase their value propositions (Teufel and Zimmermann 2015). Brand consistency is not dependent on standardising retail design. Aesop, Camper, and Starbucks are global brands that have established unique retail store designs that communicate authenticity while ensuring consistency is maintained. Aesop, for example, ensures a consistent application of two principles: "the removal of visual excess" and "the concept of visual abundance" (Down and Paphitis 2019). These principles have contributed to the recognition of the brand, despite a portfolio of unique retail store designs. Thus, it is possible for brands to retain consistency, while communicating unique brand expressions through once-off retail designs.

Unique retail design and authenticity

In the world of retailing, authenticity is "what consumers want" (Gilmore and Pine 2007). According to Gilmore and Pine (2007), this authenticity can be accomplished through the brand's commodities, goods, services, experiences, and transformations. The authors emphasise the drive of consumers towards authentic experiences. As consumers base their consumption choices on their self-identity, they choose to align with brands that resonate with their self-images (Plevoets and Van Cleempoel 2011). The retail interior contributes to this ecology of consumption by becoming a consumed commodity itself. Interiors are objects of consumption that facilitate further consumption. They contain social meanings such as status and prestige (Königk 2015). As such they are, like brands, expressions of individual identity. In this context, consumers discern between what they perceive is 'fake' and 'original', favouring the authenticity of retail experiences (Gilmore and Pine 2007). This process of authentication extends to a consumer's need to verify the brand's ethical performance through traceability, the idea that transparency to the origin and manufacturing of products communicates the authenticity of a brand and its social and ecological impacts (Teufel and Zimmermann 2015). Therefore, should a brand yield mass-produced stores, it decreases in authenticity and value and becomes less desirable as a place of self-expression for consumers.

This implies that brands should prioritise authenticity in their retail design and work towards unique retail stores (Plevoets and Van Cleempoel 2011). These interiors should demonstrate an ongoing reinterpretation of a brand's identity by drawing inspiration from the brand's roots (Newman and Dhar 2014).

Teufel and Zimmermann (2015) advocate for retail design that is not mass-produced to enhance authenticity and create value for the brand. They argue that authentic retail design (unique and non-reproducible retail environments) can communicate product value in the same way that original artworks signify exclusivity in a museum. This is an example of the retail interior functioning as small-scale production, with greater autonomy from the field of power (Hesmondhalgh 2006). We argue that localising retail design can support this endeavour of associating authenticity with small-scale production. The place specificity associated with localised retail design can create value for the brand and its products through increasing the perceived authenticity of its retail design (Teufel and Zimmermann 2015). Plevoets and Van Cleempoel (2011) echo the contribution of venue to authenticity in retail design. As example, they suggest that retailers may opt to use heritage buildings as unique sites that contribute originality to a retailer, enhancing their authentic value.

Buildings with cultural significance (for example, historic buildings) can enhance value for brands by differentiating the retailer from competitors (Petermans and Van Cleempoel 2009). The strategy of housing retail in historic buildings can enhance the authenticity of experiences for consumers because of the unique nature of the store's architectural environment (Plevoets and Van Cleempoel 2011). The adaptation of historic structures to allow for

the retrofit of retail functions within these spaces requires careful design attention so that the authenticity of the building and its surroundings are not compromised by their adaptation (Plevoets and Van Cleempoel 2011).

The allocation of retail in historic buildings may portray inauthenticity to consumers, should the design detract from the "cultural identity of the place" and the historic identity of the building in which the store is located (Plevoets and Van Cleempoel 2011). Localised retail design, similarly, cannot serve to represent the context alone in order to remain authentic. We argue that it must also express the global brand's identity to communicate authenticity to consumers.

Similarly, to ensure local authenticity, the retail store's association with place requires a sensitive and responsive design approach to the local context. As place becomes a unique and authentic environment with which the brand can associate, the sense of 'here and now' on which authenticity is reliant can enhance value for a brand (Teufel and Zimmermann 2015). This is evidenced by a growing number of companies who identify with their locale to illustrate the importance of place (Pine and Gilmore 2008).

Localisation can aid authenticity in retail design by reflecting the sense of 'here and now' that is specific to the localised retail store. Instead of mass-produced global store concepts (that devalue the brand and its product (Teufel and Zimmermann 2015)), retail design may take on unique, location-specific expressions that can enhance brand authenticity and add value for the global brand. They become mediators between small-scale and mass production. These unique retail stores can possess the qualities of traceability to the location (in which the brand is based) and the quality of originality (by embodying a unique design expression that is of 'the here and now') (Teufel and Zimmermann 2015)

However, authenticity becomes contentious when the brand does not honour its prerogative to convey its own essence in order to remain authentic to itself. This is important because consumers may not authenticate retail design if its expression contradicts the brand's heritage (Pine and Gilmore 2008). This sense of contradiction can risk backfiring by being perceived as superficial (Pine and Gilmore 2008) and inauthentic to, or inconsistent with the brand (for example, a fast-food retailer opting to open a retail store on an organic farm may present contradictions between the brand's identity and its association with a locale). These tensions between the authentic expressions of brand and place require contemplation.

Tensions between authentic expressions of brand and place

Authenticity can be approached from distinctive perspectives according to different disciplines (Plevoets and Van Cleempoel 2011). For example, in the adaptive reuse of historic buildings for retail design, a heritage-conservationist's approach to authenticity, a retailer's approach to authenticity, and an interior designer's approach to authenticity may provide differing responses to place specificity (Plevoets and Van Cleempoel 2011). These

varying aims of authenticity can create a contentious pull that may lead to emphasis in one area of authenticity while sacrificing authenticity in another.

Similarly, the designer's self-expression may cause subservience of brand identity in retail design when affording creative scope to retail designers. This is contextualised in accordance with the directives to high-profile designers that brands appoint to add value to their retail design (Quartier 2011). However, the high-profile designer may prioritise personal stylistic creativity over and above the identity of the brand in retail design. While the individual retail design expression is authentic, this may occur at a loss to authenticity to the brand itself (Quartier 2011). In localising retail design, the objectives of authenticity to place and authenticity to brand pose conflicting objectives. There is a risk of perceived inauthenticity to brand or place. This requires the mediation between brand and place as a strategic objective.

In the process of localising retail design, two degrees of authenticity are to be mediated: authenticity to the brand and authenticity to the place. Figure 1 indicates varying degrees of authenticity and emphasises that the authenticity of localised retail design is conditional upon both brand and local authenticity.

Figure 1. Degrees of authenticity in retail design

Although sources exist to contemplate authentic retail design, brand authenticity, and local authenticity (with limitation in the retail design discourse), the areas that require mediation in global brand and local authenticity remain unknown. We view this gap in knowledge as an important area for research development.

The identification of areas for mediating global brand and local authenticity can aid global brand managers and retail designers to address the simultaneous interests of authenticity to global brand and local place without compromising the interests of each. The study therefore aims to fill this void by presenting areas for mediating global brand and local authenticity when localising retail design.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

To gain an in-depth understanding of mediating global brand and local authenticity to localise retail design, we engaged in a constructivist grounded theory research process. Constructivist grounded theory allows researchers an iterative process of data collection and analysis to generate theory through inductive procedures of qualitative research (Charmaz 2014).

The first author of this paper conducted the data collection and analysis under the supervision of the co-authors. We collectively ensured a rigorous study protocol was followed.. The research design involved qualitative interviews with retail design practitioners and the theoretical sampling of localised retail stores for global brands.

Selection criteria for respondents

For the purpose of the study, respondents were designers possessing knowledge on localised retail design for global brands. Respondents either had a) direct experience working on localised retail design for a global brand; or b) expressed authority in the practice or study of localised retail design for global brands. The respondents were identified through authored publications (practice-based, press-based, *and/or* academic) and their involvement in the design of localised retail stores for global brands. This ensured the relevant selection of respondents as experts in localised retail design.

Sample

Due to the global concern for the topic, global representation in the respondent sample was important (it was pertinent to interview respondents in different regions). The nationality and country of residence of respondents did differ for some respondents, and certain respondents worked on retail design projects outside of their base location. This is reflective of the global nature of retail design work for global brands and does not present a variable. Although the concentration of respondents varies per region, this did not pose concern in the study due to the global nature of retail practice. It is conventional for retail designers to conduct work for global brands to accomplish a global portfolio of work. This ensured a global representation of respondents due to practice impact beyond their base locations. Various designer types were identified as working on localised retail design for global brands. We ensured that we engaged with a range of designer categories (including small practice designers, in-house brand designers, designers at design agencies, and high-profile designers).
The sample is detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Interview respondent sample

Case No.	Location of Respondent	Designer type	Interview type
1	Africa	Small practice designer	In person
2	Africa	Small practice designer	In person
3	Africa	In-house brand designer	Digital
4	Africa	Designer at design agency	Digital
5	Australia	Small practice designer	Digital
6	Africa	Small practice designer	Digital
7	Australia	Designer at design agency	Digital
8	Africa	Designer at design agency	Digital
9	United Kingdom	Small practice designer	Digital
10	North America	In-house brand designer	Digital
11	Asia	Small practice designer	Digital
12	Australia	Small practice designer	Digital
13	North America	Designer at design agency	Digital
14	North America	Designer at design agency	Digital
15	United Kingdom	Designer at design agency	Digital
16	Africa	In-house brand designer	Digital
17	Europe	High-profile designer	Written
18	South America	High-profile designer	Written

The interview duration ranged between thirty and ninety minutes. Two interviews were conducted in person, fourteen took place using online meeting platforms. Two respondents opted to supply written responses through email.

Analysis

The interviews were transcribed and analysed using processes of coding, categorising, and memo-writing. The memo-writing process involved segmenting data and recording textual observations alongside relevant segments of data. These memos were compiled alongside iterated visual mind maps that were manually drawn. The first iteration occurred during the interview, and the second occurred by listening to the audio recording of the interview. The process was resolved with a hermeneutic process of constant comparison (after Webb 1997). We compared the visual mind maps with codes, written memos, and the emergent categories pertaining to areas for mediating global brand and local authenticity. This entailed an iterative and inductive research process of concurrent data collection and analysis.

The interview process led to the emergence of the research question: *What are the areas for mediating global brand and local authenticity when localising retail design?*

Categorical saturation was reached using theoretical sampling. This was in the form of a desktop study of twenty localised retail stores for four global brands (Aesop, Dolce & Gabbana, Nike, and Starbucks).The global brands were selected according to their alignment with the study's substantive area (localised retail design for global

brands). In order to focus the investigation acutely on the emerging theory, we created an initial list of brands identified by the study respondents. Following this, the global brands were subjected to a series of questions to determine their inclusion in the study:

- Does the brand have retail store designs across multiple locations in the world?

- Has the brand made statements about its localised retail design?

- Does the brand have multiple examples of localised store designs?

- Is there adequate and accessible information pertaining to the brands and their artefacts?

The sample of localised retail stores are listed below.

Table 2. Theoretical sample of localised retail stores

Case No.	Store name and location	Designer	Year built
A1	Aesop Kyoto. Kyoto, Japan.	Shinichiro Ogata (Simplicity)	2014
A2	Aesop Flinders Lane. Melbourne, Australia.	Aesop Design Department	2015
A3	Aesop Brera. Milan, Italy.	Vincenzo de Cotiis Architects	2015
A4	Aesop Vila Madalena. São Paulo, Brazil.	Estudio Campana	2016
A5	Aesop Park Slope. New York, United States.	Frida Escobedo	2019
D1	Dolce & Gabbana Aoyama. Tokyo, Japan.	Gwenael Nicolas, (Curiosity)	2016
D2	Dolce & Gabbana London. London, United Kingdom.	Gwenael Nicolas (Curiosity)	2017
D3	Dolce & Gabbana Saint Barthélemy. Gustavia, Saint Barthélemy.	Steven Harris	2017
D4	Dolce & Gabbana Rome. Rome, Italy.	Eric Carlson (Carbondale)	2019
N1	Nike Live Melrose. Los Angeles, United States.	Nike Global	2018
N2	Nike House of Innovation 001. Shanghai, China.	Nike Global	2018
N3	Nike Rise Guangzhou. Guangzhou, China.	Nike Global	2020
N4	Nike Unite Concept. Asia, United States, United Kingdom.	Nike Global	2020
S1	Starbucks The Bank. Amsterdam, Netherlands.	Liz Muller (Starbucks Global)	2012
S2	Starbucks Dazaifu Tenman-gu. Tokyo, Japan.	Kengo Kuma and Associates	2012
S3	Starbucks Mall of Africa. Johannesburg, South Africa.	Starbucks EMEA	2016
S4	Starbucks Reserve Seattle. Seattle, United States.	Liz Muller (Starbucks Global)	2014
S5	Starbucks Reserve Milan. Milan, Italy.	Liz Muller (Starbucks Global)	2018
S6	Starbucks Reserve New York. New York, United States.	Liz Muller (Starbucks Global)	2018
S7	Starbucks Reserve Tokyo. Tokyo, Japan.	Liz Muller (Starbucks Global)	2019

The theoretical sample was used to verify the study findings and to saturate the emergent categories. This was concluded during the write-up phase, which served to consolidate the theory on mediating global brand and local authenticity in localised retail design.

AREAS FOR MEDIATING GLOBAL BRAND AND LOCAL AUTHENTICITY IN LOCALISED RETAIL DESIGN

Findings

In the analytical phase of the research, the categories were identified through a grouping of prominent and frequently occurring codes in the data.

The data contained ideas on who designs and/or creates the retail store, what informs the design, how it is translated to design, and what is experienced once consumers are using the retail store. We considered all of the emergent codes in relation to a larger topic or grounded theory category. These categories formed the basis of conceptualising the grounded theory that later informed the literature search.

By clustering the codes, we were able to classify information according to three categories that pertained to the strategies for localising retail design for global brands. These were Authorship, Informants, and Inhabitation.

Table 3 defines each of these areas.

Table 3. Categories identified in the research process

Authorship	Authorship pertains to who designs the retail store. It specifically refers to the stakeholders who provide the creativity imbued in the conception (conceptual design) and making (assembly, composition, and construction) of the retail store. Design authorship is attributed to the designer or design team, but it can include stakeholders beyond designers. Authors contribute creativity to realising a project. The appointment, team-composition and roles of authors is of importance.
Informants	Informants pertains to the processes engaged in the sourcing of knowledge (as informants to design); the knowledge produced, and the process of synthesising and translating this knowledge into conceptual decisions realised in retail design. The designer, and at times, brand, are instrumental in this process of research and analysis, while designers are responsible for the interpretation, conceptualisation, and expression of informants into a design proposal.
Inhabitation	Inhabitation pertains to store occupation, the processes involved in inhabitation and the experiences in the retail space. The primary stakeholder involved in inhabitation is the consumer. Although not the focal inhabitant, the staff of the retail store also partake in the inhabitation process.

The mediation of global brand and local authenticity within the respective areas of Authorship, Informants, and Inhabitation is discussed below.

Authorship of retail design by brand designers and local designers

The study found that in the process of authorship, brand and local authenticity may be mediated through the appointment of both brand designers and local designers. The collaboration between brand designers (or designers who have repeated experience working with the brand) and local designers ensures both local and brand expertise is represented in the design of the retail stores.

Global brands conventionally appoint either their own in-house design teams or designers familiar with the brand (having worked with the brand previously) on their retail design. This is a measure towards retaining consistency as these designers may be viewed as brand experts, who are familiar with the quality and standards associated with the global brand's retail design. However, the study found that respondents who worked as in-house designers had experienced a lack of innovation and creativity due to working with a single brand over an extended period. Although global designers may attempt to localise retail design, this was viewed as problematic due to the position of the global designer in relation to the local context.

The position of the designer can be understood as the ways in which their norms, views, ideals, and perspectives are integral informants to how and what they design. Fox et al. (2020) explain that designers' positionality can affect the design product: "…the relations that enter into the formation of design interventions and the ways that a designer's situation affects the matter of the designs". Working with positionality requires designers to exert reflective practices on their personal position and their situation in power dynamics (Fox, et al. 2020).

The global designer may be reflective in order to move towards further strategies or techniques of localising of retail design whether this is through authorship, informants, *and/or* inhabitation processes. However, certain oversights may preclude the global retail designer from working with the nuances of local culture as informants in retail design (Khan 2021). These oversights can lead to cultural misrepresentation or appropriation. These can threaten local authenticity in retail design and perpetuate cultural harm (Khan 2021).

The appointment of local designers in creative input in localising retail design is of importance. Respondent 11 spoke about their approach to initiating a local collaboration to ensure an authentic representation of local identity in design across global contexts:

> *.. a Taiwanese company want us to design a Thai restaurant inside Taiwan, and I told them,*
> *are you sure? Why don't you find a Thai designer, so it is probably easier because they have*
> *all this culture and history, so, but in the end they still hire me and what I did is actually I went*
> *to Thailand and I found a Thailand Designer and so we worked together to finish that project.*
> *So, I feel there is still a very strong Thailand identity inside the shop,* **Respondent 11.**

The designer's own identity and intersection of identities play a role in their ability to understand and design for the lived experience of others. The perception of designer and user as same and 'Other' contribute to the problems associated with designer positionality (Fox, et al. 2020). The overlap between the designer's own identity and that of the consumer is favourable as it indicates a compatibility in values that can transcend into design. Königk (2015) describes this overlap in cultural meaning as 'circumstantial selections' where an intersection between the understanding of the designer and inhabitant of interior spaces can enable a compatibility between the intended and recognised meaning of space. In the case of localised retail design, an alignment between the identities of designers and consumers are an indicator of an alignment of positionality. This is a precursor to the making of appropriate meaning through retail design. Therefore, the local retail designer can draw on local essence and translate this in ways that can resonate closely with local consumers, and thus facilitate authentic inhabitation.

However, local designers may not possess the knowledge and expertise held within the brand's own in-house design team or designers repeatedly appointed to work for the global brand. The unique expertise of the brand designer enhances brand consistency. In-house brand designers can aid in accomplishing brand consistency due to their brand knowledge and experience which in turn can threaten the perception of brand authenticity.

It is suggested that brands can take a mediated approach of working with both in-house (or repeat) designers and local designers to collaborate on localised retail design. This can bring a balance of local creativity and consistency to the brand's retail design. These may support the process of working authentically with brand essence and within local essence as generators of localised retail design.

Starbucks, for example, produces design from an in-house design team; however, they have regional-dedicated in-house design teams and employ techniques of curating local creativity in their retail design. This ensures that retail design authorship is collaborative and includes local representation (Alaali & Vines 2020).

Brand essence and local essence as mutual design informants

The study found that global brand and local authenticity can be mediated around 'Informants' to localised retail design. In the process of deriving informants to localise retail design, brand and place authenticity is achieved by returning to the essence of the brand and the essence of the location as mutual informants to localised retail design for global brands.

During the informant identification process, designers identify sources that will inform the design, gather information, process this information (through analysis and synthesis), and conceptualise design expressions on this basis. The process of working with informants can range from the pragmatic and analytical to the intuitive and creative, involving subjective and objective decision-making (Lu and Liu 2011). As all design projects present unique parameters (including the designer), no specific approach is advanced.

As design is a subjective response, multiple expressions are possible and viable. This coincides with a poststructuralist notion of a subjective relationship between the designer's intended meaning and the consumer's interpretation of this meaning when experiencing design (after Eco 1990). This requires recognition of the creative role that the consumer plays in interpretation. The consumer, as future inhabitant, must accurately interpret the interior in such a way that they experience an authentic brand message which they agree with. As a communication channel for the brand, the retail store is expressive of the brand's identity. As consumers choose their association with brands as a form of self-expression, they selectively occupy and inhabit retail stores accordingly.

Claes et al. (2016) address the retail design process model and illustrate the various stages of retail design, from the inception of a project through to use. In their model, informants affect conventional retail design processes, which omit the site and context as components of the conventional retail design brief.

This is for two reasons: firstly, retail design is primarily viewed as an expression of the brand that conventionally rolls out in standardised formats, and secondly, retail stores occupy sites that do not always provide distinctive characteristics such as shops in malls (these possess generic architectural features). These sites facilitate the roll out of standardised retail design. As with localised retail design, the introduction of location as an informant requires mediation between both local and brand essence in order to ensure that retail design is authentic.

> *... these ideas, they don't exist anywhere within the core [BRAND 1] brand. So that then became the interesting challenge is, are these compatible with the core of [BRAND 1's] brand. Some might be more compatible than others and what happens when you blend the two different influences. The influences coming from the location with the global influences coming from the brand itself,* **Respondent 15a**.

Contextual authenticity is reliant on a designer's discretion to mediate between the brand and place. This discretion plays a role in the sourcing of informants, their processing, and their expression through retail design. Designer discretion is a consistent precondition for all design projects, regardless of the programme or function. While design occurs on a spectrum of subjective to objective decision-making (Lu and Liu 2011), the 'informants' phase of design requires a grounding of subjective expression of design in brand material and in data on the local context. This is to generate a contemporary design outcome rooted in the study of informants, rigour in processing, and the creativity and intuition of design expression. While design cannot exist as the self-expression of the designer but must be based on rigorous knowledge practices that will contribute to greater accountability for design decisions, good design cannot be achieved without a well-developed and applied design intuition.

Brand consistency can be reinforced through contextual design if a brand's approach towards deriving informants for localising retail design is consistent. For example, Dolce & Gabbana (an Italian originating global luxury fashion brand) embarked on a campaign to localise retail design. The intention was that "aesthetics and brand values are combined with unique features and elements of excellence of each city" (world.dolcegabbana.com s.a.).

As a further example, brand consistency and localising retail design can be mediated by regarding the global brand as a lens through which to localise retail design. This forms a consistent approach to localising retail design. Crucial brand elements are established as non-negotiable, recognisable features that should create a golden thread throughout retail design expressions. Subservient to this lies creative freedom to interpret location and reflect this in retail design.

Brands may also define consistency through localised retail design by defining consistent elements that can be locally interchangeable in each localised retail expression. Dolce & Gabbana demonstrate this technique. The global fashion brand embarked on the DG Evolution campaign in 2016 with the strategy to localise retail design. The intention was that "aesthetics and brand values are combined with unique features and elements of excellence of each city" (world.dolcegabbana.com, *s.a.*). This provided a parameter for the designers to source inspiration from the locations in which they were designing. First, they would be looking at the location on city level; and second, they would be looking at what makes these cities "unique" and "excellent" (world.dolcegabbana.com, *s.a.*). This is both a consistent approach to localising the design for Dolce & Gabbana's retail design boutiques and a point of resonance between the global brand and local context (excellence of the city). .

Authenticity is achieved by returning to both the essence of the brand and the essence of the location in drawing sources of inspiration for the retail design. There are multiple possibilities for configuring the alignment of brand and local essence. The communication of brand and local essence in retail design can support authenticity during the process of inhabitation.

Inhabitation that facilitates brand and local consumer identity construction

The study found that global brand and local authenticity may be mediated in the inhabitation of localised retail design. In the process of consumer inhabitation of retail stores, brand- and local authenticity requires that the retail design inhabitation facilitate the construction of brand identity and local consumer identity concurrently.

As an act of conspicuous consumption, the inhabitation of retail spaces follows on the process of identity construction (as an indicator of the consumer's interaction with the brand) (following Veblen 1899). Consumers align themselves with brands as a form of identity construction (Arnould and Thompson 2005). The concept of conspicuous consumption (consumption as an indicator of identity) has moved from an indication of status and wealth to other areas of identity expression, such as values, social affiliations, culture, and lifestyle (Chernev et al. 2011).

Consumers opt to select and associate with brands that relate to who they are and what they stand for. Brands act as lenses through which the consumer can develop their individual identity projects (Arnould and Thompson 2005). Alignment with brands indicates an expression of self. Brands also signify community. By aligning with a particular brand, a consumer communicates about who they are and about a community of people of shared interests and causes (Chernev et al. 2011). Brands are indicative of the social status of their consumers and derive meaning from the cultural context (Sharma 2017). Consumers who align with brands display their affiliation with wealth and social structures (Sharma 2017).

In this process of identity construction, consumers are in search of authenticity in their consumption experiences (Plevoets and Van Cleempoel 2011).

> *…customers purchase on the basis of conforming to their self-image; what they buy must reflect who they are and who they aspire to be in relation to how they perceive the world. As consumers increasingly see the world in terms of 'true' versus 'fake', authenticity becomes increasingly important for retailers.* (Plevoets and Van Cleempoel 2011:4)

The retail store acts as a space that facilitates this process of identity construction. By inhabiting brand spaces, consumers display their affiliation (or an aspiration towards this) to the brand and its community. Those who occupy brand spaces further the perceptions and understanding of the brand. Consumers seek to reinterpret and

internalise the symbolic meaning conveyed by brands and express these within their individual identity projects (Arnould and Thompson 2005).

In localised retail design for global brands, the process of identity construction for brand and consumer are synergetic. Retail design requires the representation of brand as a form of constructing identity for the brand, particularly in international contexts where consumers' recognition of the brand may be obscure.

However, as retail design enhances consumer-brand relationships through the inhabitation process, an authentic connection with the local consumer necessitates creating an experience that is platformed on the consumers' identity projects through a form of consumer centric design. This entails reimagining the identity of the brand alongside the process of centralising consumers' pursuit of identity construction in the retail design.

Through inhabitation, consumers can associate with a space that they recognise and that is representative of who they are. The retail store can be adorned with goods, materials, and finishes that reflect this familiarity through aesthetics. By utilising the consumer as an informant, localised retail design can be informed by and re-inform the identity of local consumers.

For example, Nike Live is a localised retail concept that sees the local consumer relevance as important to the retail design. The brand accomplishes this through using local consumer app-data as an indicator of the product and lifestyle preferences of local consumers. These are catered for in retail design through services, programmes, and merchandise. The brand finds expression of its identity through a sports-focus, by resonating with local consumers from the perspective of "everyone is an athlete" (News.nike.com 2019). This sees a mediation between the construction of brand and consumer identity in retail design.

Inhabitation processes are about identity construction for the brand and consumers. To support authenticity in inhabitation, localised retail design can be founded on pre-existing local consumer interests (mediated with brand interests). This necessitates a consumer-centric approach to localised retail design that can be escalated into further avenues revealed by the brand. This is an area for caution, as global brands have the agency to mediate culture in ways that perpetuate global ideals (Sharma 2017).Through inhabitation, consumers should learn about the brand and forge connections with the brand, while furthering their own identities through the brand's worlds.

These three areas through which global brand and local authenticity can be mediated when localising retail design – authorship, informants and inhabitation -   form the precursor to a nascent conceptual model for areas for mediating brand and local authenticity in localised retail design.

Towards a conceptual model for mediating brand and local authenticity in localised retail design.

The conceptual model described in Figure 2 illustrates the mediation of these processes to enhance brand and local authenticity in localised retail design.
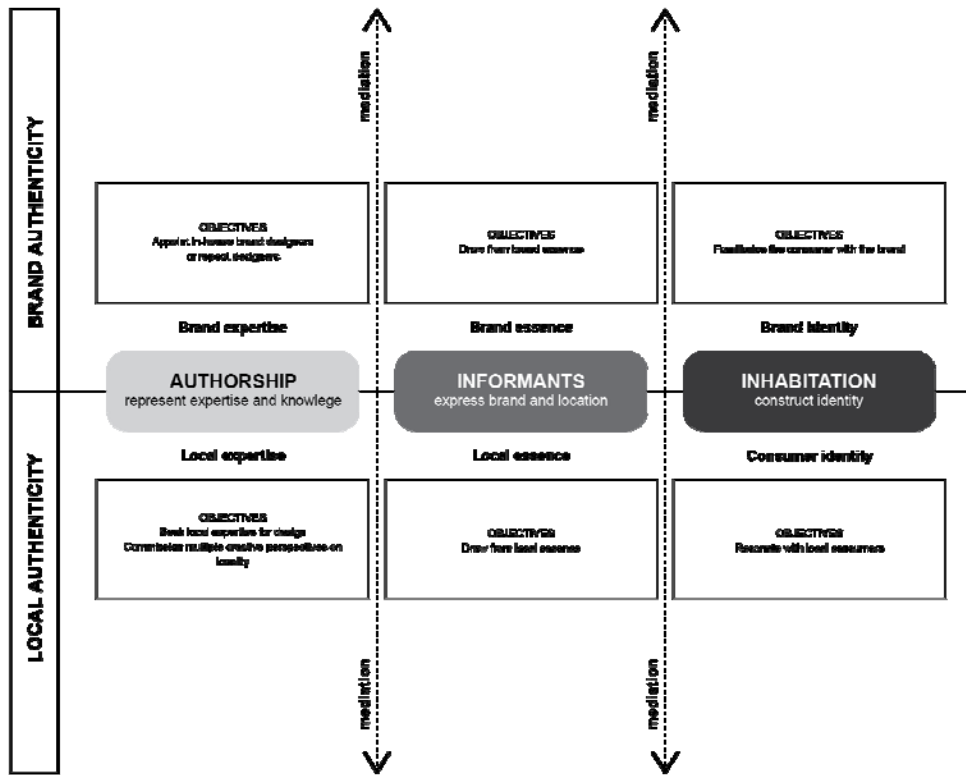

Figure 2. Conceptual model for areas for mediating global brand and local authenticity in localised retail design

The conceptual model serves as a point of departure to deliberate the mediation of brand and local authenticity when localising retail design for the global brand For global brand managers this model can inform their appointment processes (of local and brand designers) and their retail design brief development by prompting strategic approaches to localising retail design. For retail designers trying to provide both brand and local authenticity it strengthens the design process by foregrounding the areas where mediation, collaboration and co-creation are required.

CONCLUSION

The study may be positioned within the retail design and brand management discourses and enhances an understanding of authenticity in retail design. Investigation into the concept of authenticity in retail design reveals that while unique retail design contributes to authenticity, a brand must reflect as true to itself prior to conveying other modes of authenticity. Authenticity has the potential to enhance the value of a brand and its products to consumers. Brands may attain this authenticity through one-of-a-kind, uniquely produced, and localised retail stores. However, threats to brand consistency arise with the continued renegotiation of retail design that represents

the local place. This necessitates an approach that considers brand recognition while localising retail design. Similarly, authenticity has unique implications on the representation of local place in retail design. This unexplored avenue in the literature calls for consideration towards balancing brand and place in authentic localised retail design.

Through this study, we considered this mediation of authenticity to brand and place when localising retail design. The findings suggest three areas of mediation of authenticity in localised retail design for global brands.

- First, we propose that this occurs in authorship of the retail design. This requires the appointment of both brand and local designers. This is to ensure brand and local expertise are represented in the retail design process,

- Second, we suggest that the informants to localised retail design require a mediation between brand and local essence. This is in order to ensure the representation of a brand and local identity through the retail design, and

- Third, we recommend that authenticity be mediated in the area of inhabitation, by representing the identity of the brand while generating consumer-centric experiences in retail design.

The identification of these specific areas of mediation between global brand and local authenticity in localised retail design is a novel contribution to the discourse. These are illustrated in a conceptual model as a precursor for ongoing studies.

The study has theoretical implications for the retail design process and for the strategies for localising retail design and its findings see application in the practice of localised retail design. It may inform global brand management, design management, brand identity management, and retail design parties in practicing localising retail design for the global brand. Brands may find the model useful in appointment of designers, formulating strategic parameters in the retail design brief, and in evaluating their current processes of localising retail design for global brands.

While the study forms a useful starting point to contemplate mediating brand and local authenticity, it is generated to initiate a discourse on localising retail design for global brands. The limitations of an introductory model that has not been tested is acknowledged: the conceptual model can be further tested and developed through alternative sampling strategies (by engaging global brand managers and consumers) or research designs (case studies of brands).

Further research may be conducted into elaborating on each process of mediation (authorship, informants, and inhabitation) through empirical studies. The model may be expanded to contemplate other means of design mediation in the retail design process, for example:

- The mediation between the brand and consumer in instances of consumer-centric design, or

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- The mediation between brand and the stylistic expression of high-profile designers appointed on retail design projects, or

- The mediation between brand and authenticity in stores located in heritage buildings.

While consumers base consumption choices on the authenticity of brands and their experiences, localised retail design can place brands in a position to express such authenticity. However, in order to attain authenticity, localised retail design requires a balancing act between brand and place.

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